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ABSTRACT

The decline in civility, social responsibility, and institutional affiliation challenges the nature of schooling. Child development in the 1990s family is under pressure from changes that deny children the three basic essentials (nurture, structure, and latitude) for psychological health, effective learning, and civility, and that require children to adapt and sacrifice while favoring adult well-being. In addition to family changes, the school is challenged by: (1) a call for expanded academic curriculum; (2) an improved understanding of student learning; (3) an abdication of child-rearing tasks by family and other social institutions; (4) diminished student readiness and civility, and accelerating parental demands and criticism; and (5) faculty resistance to and resentment of changing status with parents. Schools' typical responses to these changes are: (1) case-by-case--try to restore proper respect as an incident occurs; (2) get them help--offer help for individual violations; or (3) train them--seek to improve behavior and communication through social and emotional learning. Results of these approaches since the 1980s are mixed and suggest that a change in perspective is needed. Rather than "How can the school overcome problems," schools need to ask, "How might the school reduce problems and prevent some of them?" as a means of strategically restructuring relationships with families. To widen consensus within the faculty, school staff need to clarify the purpose and conduct of school and parents, focus on strengths rather than deficiencies, and commit to a few central values. Once this commitment has been made, schools need to introduce the consensus to students and parents by using an array of forums and by continuing initiatives that renew information. In the current climate, challenges can be met only by moderating demands or increasing supports. (DLH)

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CHANGING FAMILIES CHANGING SCHOOLS

Robert Evans, Ed.D.

Educators everywhere are more and more concerned about students and their families. In schools across the country—public and private, large and small, rich and poor, urban and suburban—they report that students are harder to reach and teach, their attention and motivation harder to sustain, their language and behavior more provocative. And they complain that parents are more anxious about their children's success, yet less available to support and guide them, and are more demanding and critical of the school. "We're seeing more performance and behavior problems than ever before," says a high school headmaster, "and more of the exceptionally serious kind. We can't keep up with parents' relentless expectations and we can't get used to their refusal or inability to set limits on their kids—or to back us up when we do."

Here are three episodes out of a long list cited by this administrator and others at a recent conference: sixth graders break into the school office, photocopy classmates' report cards, and distribute them at a party; ninth graders pursue a year-long, organized scheme of cheating on tests and exams; seniors publish a "scum sheet" accusing some classmates of promiscuity and drug abuse and ridiculing the appearance, race, and religion of others. And, in each of these cases, the parents of the offenders, far from being apologetic, hire lawyers to contest the discipline meted out by the school.

Incidents like these are not the norm—many schools still enjoy strong rapport with, and support from, the large majority of their students and parents. But they are not just isolated outliers, either. They are the leading edge of a trend among students and parents from all socio-economic groups, including the most privileged: a decline in civility, social responsibility, and institutional affiliation. This trend is perhaps the most complex of all the challenges confronting schools today, because it affects virtually everything they try to do. It is transforming the nature of schooling and the lives of teachers, administrators, and board members. Even as they are pressed to accelerate academic performance and prepare students for the 21st century, schools find themselves struggling to fill more gaps of the most basic kind and unable to take for granted the shared understandings and mutual responsibility on which they have long counted.

Although educators and parents sometimes blame each other for these trends, in truth, there are no villains. The causes lie more in larger social and economic changes than in bad faith or a lack of caring on either side. Indeed, the irony at the heart of the growing division between home and school is that all the participants are caught in a similar crucible, the classic stress position in which demands are too high, supports are too low, and, despite the best intentions and efforts, a chronic sense of inadequacy prevails.

The Changing Family

The American family has been transformed over the past 40 years. As David Elkind shows in *Ties That Stress*, the famous nuclear family of the 1950s (a breadwinner, a homemaker, and several children) has yielded to a postmodern "permeable family" of the 1990s (single-parent, remarried, and

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two-career households). The new family structure is more fluid, less stable, and more vulnerable to outside pressures than its predecessor. It differs markedly its prevailing sentiments, basic values, views of child development and parenting, and use of authority. The nuclear family, as Elkind traces it, aimed to be a domestic refuge from the pressures of a demanding world, with marriage a lifelong commitment and childrearing the province of parents, especially of a warm, nurturing mother. Its central value was togetherness: family was placed before self; spouses were to sacrifice for each other, parents for their children's future. Parental authority, if not absolute, was largely unilateral. Children were seen as innocent and adolescents as immature, and parents were to provide them protection, guidance, and discipline.

By contrast, the contemporary permeable family has become Elkind notes, more of a meeting place, a television-dominated railway station for heavily-scheduled parents and children who all lead ever-busier lives out of the home, with marriage seen more as a current consensus that respects each party's individuality and childrearing as a task heavily shared with paid caregivers. The central value of the new family is autonomy: individual family members pursue their own fulfillment. Parents are freer to end a marriage—fully half of the nation's first-graders can now expect that before they graduate their parents will divorce—and are increasingly focussed on jobs and careers outside the home—more and more parents now work and their average work week is lengthening. Parental authority has weakened appreciably and is now often at best mutual, a matter of constant renegotiation with children, even the very young. We now emphasize children's competence (cognitive, social, emotional) and adolescents' sophistication (about computers, consumerism, sex, drugs). Parents are far less likely to set firm guidelines or to sanction misbehavior, far more likely to negotiate with children about all sorts of decisions, to routinely allow—even encourage—them to make decisions that earlier parents would have found unthinkable.

Of course, children and families are part of a larger world. Many parents, like many educators and many social critics, have long blamed the decline of civility generally and children's deteriorating respect for adult authority in particular on the media, especially television, with its sensationalism, its emphasis on violence, sex, hedonism, and cynicism. This critique has been made so often that I will not dwell on it here. But even if we grant the danger of the media's appeal, our very willingness as parents to let television play such a large part in children's lives helps make the contemporary family so "permeable" and reflects the sharp shift away from parents-know-best and unilateral authority. And though many parents decry the influence of larger social forces on their children, they themselves are not immune. Visible among adults everywhere is a greater skepticism, a general mistrust of institutions, which is apparently felt by many parents (many of whom were adolescents during the tumultuous, iconoclastic 1970s), making them less likely to respect the school's authority or to model such respect for their children.

This summary is far too brief and oversimplifies social transitions that are enormously complex. It frames the nuclear family in terms of its ideal, even though its actuality, as Elkind readily admits, could be quite different and its consequences not always benign. (The 1950s were no Ideal Age and few of us would willingly restore life as it then was.) But whatever its limitations, *the traditional family was strongly child-*

centered. It typically favored the well-being of the young and required sacrifice by parents. The permeable family reverses the burden, favoring the well-being of adults and requiring adaptation and sacrifice by children. We can devote more time to our jobs and careers, working harder and longer, by necessity and preference, but growing numbers of children are denied the basics of on which psychological health, effective learning, and civility and community depend.

Child Development Under Pressure

What are these basics? A comprehensive list would be long. But among all the factors it could include, three stand out—*nurture, structure,* and *latitude*: love and acceptance; expectations and limits; the freedom to learn from experience. I think of them as child development's Holy Trinity.[1] They are irreplaceable bedrock necessities required to become a successful adult able, in Freud's famous phrase, to love and to work: a fulfilled person who can form rewarding relationships; a capable performer who can achieve productive self-sufficiency. Together, nurture, structure, and latitude are essential to development of self-esteem, and to what Daniel Goleman (1995) calls "emotional intelligence," that combination of sensitivity, optimism, and perseverance that appears to be far more important to personal and professional success in life than cognitive intelligence alone.

The earliest and perhaps most obvious component of child development is nurture. It begins as the care and attention, the ministering and comforting an infant receives, but we never outgrow our need for it. It is acceptance, not reward. It flows not because our child has achieved something, but because we belong to each other. It is the primary building block of healthy growth, the chief vehicle through which we learn how fully we can trust the world—how much we can count on others to meet our needs, respond to our feelings, and behave fairly. It is crucial to self-confidence, to social growth, and to the development of character and conscience. It is the foundation of the ability to become a participating member of a community. Nurture depends above all on parental care and support. Hence, it demands time—time to be with children, play with them, read to them, do for them, listen to them, and comfort them. Time, of course, is precisely what parents who are more self- and career-focussed lack. For years, social scientists have been reporting declines in the amount of contact between parents and children. They worry, rightly, that we are depleting what James Coleman (1987) calls our "social capital," which he defines as "the raising of children in the norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child's growing up."

The second essential developmental ingredient is structure, by which I mean guidelines and limits on behavior and expectations for performance. I think of it as a box. Inside the box is what we do; outside is what we don't do. All cultures have boxes. They differ in content, but each prescribes and proscribes. Each enjoins and rewards certain achievements and behaviors, sanctions and punishes others. Structure, too, is a key contributor to social competence and confidence. Knowing where one stands, what goes and what doesn't go, is a great comfort. It makes life and alternatives clearer, and it provides continuity and predictability, which makes it easier to be trusting and enhances one's sense of competence. Growing up with clear expectations and boundaries also helps children learn to delay gratification and become more considerate of others, which in turn means they tend to receive

more positive, esteem-enhancing responses from others.

Structure suffers badly in the permeable family. For one thing, setting expectations and limits and tolerating the friction they cause takes time. If we have too little time with our children we don't want to spend it in negative interaction. Indeed, being with children so little makes many parents feel guilty, and thus reluctant to endure the discomforts of establishing and maintaining structure. For another, parents who are uncomfortable asserting unilateral authority, who see children as competent and adolescents as sophisticated, are unlikely to establish guidelines and impose discipline.

The third key ingredient is latitude, a respect for individuality that expresses itself in a *freedom to learn from experience*. To grow into confident, competent adults, to thrive in the world of work and in relationships, children must become problem-solvers. They must discover their strengths and maximize them; learn their limitations and compensate for—or accept—them. This requires the freedom to act in the world, to experience the consequences of action. Not so much freedom that they are lost or allowed to endanger themselves, not so little that their development is stunted. Giving children the right amount of latitude one of the hardest tasks of parenting. It requires us to respect their different strengths and styles and to let them do their own problem-solving, to balance our intervention so that it is neither too little too late nor too much too soon.

In the contemporary family, the picture with respect to latitude is divided. Some parents give children far too much leeway, leaving them essentially on their own, (as young "latchkey children" home alone after school, or as unsupervised adolescents home alone for weekends—or longer—while parents are away). Many go to the opposite extreme, worrying so much about their children's future and their acquisition of early competence that they allow them little freedom to learn from experience. Parents have always wanted their children to do well, but the intensity of this anxiety is a relatively recent and extremely important development. It is a stunning irony, for example, that today's white collar parents—the wealthiest in American history—are so troubled about their own economic future—and especially their children's. In the anxious new economy of the 1990s, parents' worry about the future drives them to an ever earlier focus on their children's performance and shrinks their tolerance for problems or their patience for letting children work problems through. More generally, as a veteran teacher says, "Their attitude towards us is much more 'what have you done for my child lately' and 'I'm purchasing a service. You'd better deliver.'"

The Changing School

These challenges, though very complex, are but part of a larger context of change that threatens to overwhelm schools. Even as educators try to address the changing dynamics of families, their plates are already full: they are dealing with an array of other changes that are unique in their history. If the world of the family has been transformed in the past 40 years, so has that of the school. In the 1950s educators could confidently assume that the best way to prepare students for the future (the unknown) was to teach them about the past (the known), in ways that were broadly, if loosely, agreed upon, and included everything from an emphasis on Western Civilization to a dress code. Institutional authority was strong—the school's word was generally law. Most schools were what management experts call

"high slack" organizations: they had lots of unused capacity. The pace of innovation was slow.

All of this has changed. Schools have seen a phenomenal expansion of their tasks. Academically, the sheer volume of curriculum they try to cover as students move from kindergarten through twelfth grade has doubled (nothing is ever removed from the American syllabus or shifted to a later grade; material is only added and taught earlier). And this larger volume now includes content that is, in its upper reaches in the better schools, vastly more sophisticated. Further, in the 1950s no American school was *using* a computer, much less attempting to integrate technology into their pedagogy. Nor were they providing daycare, or trying to arm students against child abuse, eating disorders, date rape, AIDS, or racism.

This vast expansion stems from, among other sources, advances in our knowledge about how students learn, the abdication of child rearing tasks by the family and other social institutions, and criticism that our schools have failed to prepare students for a world in rapid transition. Together, they seem to have forged a general consensus that our schools need "change"—but no agreement about which changes in which order of priority. Should schools focus more on basic skills, the amassing of facts and "content," and mastery of the traditional disciplines, or on "constructivism," higher order thinking, and interdisciplinary learning? Should they confine themselves to academic excellence or also emphasize character and values—and if the latter, which traits and values and by which methods? How far should their diversity programming extend—is it enough to add multicultural events to the school calendar, or should the school make fundamental changes to respect and reflect the values and viewpoints of its new students and families? How far should technology efforts extend—is it enough to wire the campus and maximize email and Internet access, or should technology be integrated into actual instruction across the curriculum? And what about accountability? Should student achievement be assessed through traditional examinations and standardized tests or through exhibitions of practical ability to apply concepts and methods in real-life ways?

Each of these choices is, in and of itself, complex. To resolve them all would take more time and energy than most schools have available. And even then there would remain an even larger question: what priority should each initiative receive? Most schools can't decide and end up tackling too many changes simultaneously, only to discover that it is easy to overdose on good ideas. Even if every individual venture is worthwhile, when there are more than one or two they end up fragmenting energy and competing with one another for a faculty's time and allegiance and a school's budget.

Faculty Resistance

For their part, educators as people face particular difficulties in responding to changing families and students. These begin with demographics. Most teachers are veterans in midlife and midcareer who have been teaching for 20 years or more. Their lives are more complicated by personal and family demands than when they began their careers. Many are, if anything, seeking to limit involvement at school rather than increase it, and to concentrate mainly on activities they find rewarding. Yet the changes in parents and students seem to call for new and additional outreach and attention, for more work—and of a kind that many teachers don't

welcome. Many faculty recall a time when parents and students accorded them much more respect and authority; the new pattern represents to them a palpable loss of status. They resent being second-guessed and directly challenged. As one teacher put it, "a lot of us now have a lot less tolerance for these 'high maintenance' families."

However resentful they may be, teachers as a group, like other human service professionals, tend to have a hard time setting limits and saying no. They like people and want to be liked; they wish to help, nurture, and encourage. Many exhibit what I think of as "closet omnipotence," a secret conviction that one should be all things to all students. This can stimulate remarkable generosity and devotion, but can leave one unable to resist new demands and, hence, vulnerable to rising guilt and anxiety as tasks multiply.

All of this often leaves administrators in a difficult bind. They sympathize readily with faculty concerns about diminishing student readiness and civility and accelerating parental demands and criticism. At the same time, they also see the role that faculty resistance can play in exacerbating tensions, and, as a practical matter, they see the political and financial necessity of not alienating parents and voters. Among the many tensions that contribute to turnover among school leaders, these rank high.

Greater Stress

The impact of all this can be summarized simply: greater stress for all. We normally refer to stress as a kind of infection one can catch. In actuality, stress is the reaction within an organism when demands made upon it tax its ability to cope. The level of stress depends both on the severity of the challenge *and* the strength of the coping ability, on the balance between demand and resource. High levels of demand are not necessarily toxic if they are accompanied by high levels of support. Sadly, everyone in the school-student-parent triangle feels caught between too much demand and too little support and is, in turn, more likely to make more demands and offer less support.

Standard Remedies

In the face of this unprecedented and unwelcome challenge, educators and schools generally try to cope in three basic ways, which might be called *case-by case*, *get-them-help*, and *train them*. The first two consist of trying to restore the proper respect, boundaries, or expectations each time a violation occurs, using a combination of explanation, discipline, and counseling. But when a school repeatedly encounters similar kinds of problems, it is futile to view each episode just in terms of its individual factors (Why did this student do X? Why did that parent say Y? Should we refer this family for counseling? How should we handle this kind of person?). There is a need to step back and look more broadly and deeply, to address systemic causes rather than surface symptoms.

When they do so, many educators, eager to prevent problems, seek to improve behavior and communication through a variety of programs that fall under the heading of "social and emotional learning." For students, this can involve a range of efforts that essentially try to compensate for deficits in nurture, structure, and latitude. These come in many varieties, ranging from occasional talks at all-school assemblies to specific course units and "open circle" discussion of feelings and interpersonal relationships. The goals are generally to build what is sometimes called "social competency." There is now a growing roster of prepared programs, mostly for elementary and middle school students, which try to foster self-

esteem and interpersonal skills, responsibility and social justice. They include units aimed at improving students' verbal expression of feeling and their conflict resolution skills; and units aimed at eliminating teasing, bullying, put-downs, harassment, stereotyping, and racism. Other efforts seek to integrate "pro-social" themes into regular academic lessons, chiefly in social studies and English. These are all in addition to programs, mini-courses, and units targeting drug and alcohol abuse, stress, delinquency, AIDS, pregnancy, suicide, and so on.[2]

For parents, schools hope that information about child development and family communication will improve mothers' and fathers' knowledge base, their connection to and oversight of their children (nurture and structure), and their confidence in the school's ability to help students learn from the consequences of their behavior (latitude). These efforts tend to consist of lectures or workshops, presented sometimes by school staff, often by an outside expert. A few schools have created a special part-time or full-time position dedicated to parent education efforts.

Twenty years of experience with such programs have left me feeling quite mixed about them. Their goals are laudable and their quality has improved markedly, and without them students would have even fewer pro-social influences in their lives. But I worry about expecting schools to fill gaps in basic development and family functioning. I worry about the rightness: it doesn't seem fair to hold schools accountable for some of these tasks, especially at the same time as they are supposed to be implementing a whole range of academic innovation, too. I worry about the personal cost: these programs tax the time and energy of already overworked staff. And above all, I am skeptical about their *sustained* impact: no school, however nurturing, and no program, however well-designed, can overcome core deficits in children's basic nurture. And programs that promote social and emotional learning often call for an unprecedented sophistication that many students can reach periodically but cannot sustain (third graders can participate enthusiastically and effectively in a group discussion about, say, respect for differences—and then unthinkingly make fun of a peer on the playground).

Programs for parents face two obstacles. The first is a limit to the value of giving advice (few people, even those who seek it eagerly, take it and fewer still implement it as the expert recommends). The second is that the parents who most need the programs rarely attend. Says a school counselor, "I'd like to send a special notice to our most difficult parents: 'We planned this evening specifically for you. Be there!' I keep hoping but they never come."

Strategy: New Approaches, Enduring Truths

How else, then, can schools address the challenges posed by changing families? The answer, I think, begins with perspective, not action, and with strategy, not tactics. To look at the larger pattern of changes in families suggests that new relationships are here to stay. They spring from trends in social, economic, and political life that are largely beyond the school's influence—trends that diminish families' ability to provide nurture, structure, and latitude. This means that schools must stop expecting the same levels of trust, patience, confidence, and cooperation that they once counted on, and that there is no magic bullet: virtually no school, by itself, can right the imbalance. When we ask ourselves how to improve home-school

relationships we need to be sure that we don't mean, How can the school overcome these problems? but, How might the school reduce them and perhaps prevent some of them? In other words, technique won't save us: training staff to apply the right approach for each particular kind of problem situation, say, or improving the parent education program—these can be helpful ingredients in coping, but they will never be sufficient; they are secondary, not primary. Schools must start by thinking strategically and restructuring their relationships with families.

Strategy begins with a systematic effort to build and sustain consensus throughout the school community about purpose and conduct. (By "conduct," I mean behavior but also roles and responsibilities.) In my experience, the schools that preserve the best relationships with students and parents and encounter the fewest boundary-breaking problems are those that are clearest about what they stand for and what it means to be a member of their school community. Despite our liberal use of that term, there is no true community without shared values and norms for behavior. This means that a school's "providers"—its faculty, led by its principal and backed by the superintendent and school board—need to clarify and then assert the school's basic purposes and core values—not just its program goals, but the principles that guide it: What kind of school are we? What is distinctive about our approach to education? Above all, What are the conditions of membership in our community?

As they consider these questions, providers would do well to adopt a new motto: "Strengths First." Much of what is so stressful between families and schools stems from a chronic focus on correcting defects and shortcomings. But it is always easier to build on a strength than to attack a weakness, whether the task is teaching a student to read or improving parent-school communication. As educators undertake the latter, they will do better (and feel better) if they begin by cataloging their strengths and skills (and those of their students and parents), and by seeking ways to nurture these, extend them, and apply them to their challenges and weaknesses. This is an ideal way to sharpen a school's sense of purpose and its providers' confidence.

Clarity of purpose requires coalescing around a *few* truly central values, not a long list of platitudes such as are found in the typical school mission statement. And it requires a commitment that these central values apply to everyone, not just students. Many schools have expectations for student behavior; the best have expectations for *all* participants: students, faculty, staff, trustees, and parents. Thus, if respect for others is one of a school's core values, the school cannot simply preach respect to students, expect them to demonstrate it, reward them when they do and correct them when they don't. It must expect the adults in the community—faculty and parents alike—to *model* respect and to hold each other accountable for doing so.

Parents

Many readers may be wondering why I have omitted parents from the shaping of the school's agenda. Some educators and policy makers are convinced that strong parent participation in decision-making is not only morally right but improves governance. Others go further, insisting that it raises a school's academic performance. The ideal of a school that can involve parents in fundamental matters and can sustain high levels of constructive participation over time is inspiring. But in reality such schools are hard to find; there are very few of them.

This is not accidental: managing parent involvement is inherently complex. For one thing, it is simply not true that the customer is always right, that parents, even the best educated, are well informed about current educational realities and challenges and well suited to contribute to school decision-making. For another, the procedural complexities of melding multiple constituencies demand exceptional expertise and considerable time—more of both than many educators have available. Hence, early broad involvement often leads to an exhausting, procedure-riddled process—and to a mission statement that promises everything and inspires no one. It is, sadly, easy to find schools whose decision-making has been paralyzed by excessive participation.

It is important to note here that the ideology of parent involvement has emerged mostly from studies of low-performing urban schools where many families feel disenfranchised and are disengaged from their children's school work and where the challenge is to master the most basic organizational and educational tasks. Despite the occasional stirring stories of gifted principals who mobilize an entire community, most city schools have real difficulty sustaining effective parent participation. Meanwhile, many suburban schools have so much of it (usually well-meant but often colored by the anxiety I have described) that it increasingly intrudes upon professional judgment and prerogatives.

Viewed through this lens, parent involvement emerges as a range of activities with those that occur directly in school dwarfed in importance by those that occur at home. By far the greatest influence parents exert on their children's progress—*and their school's success*—is the way they parent: the nurture, structure, and latitude they provide to their children together with the messages they communicate—and the examples they set—about the importance of learning in life.

In my experience, what *is* crucial in terms of parent involvement is that parents understand and respect a school's values. This can permit—but does not require—that they play key roles in the crafting of those values. (In parochial schools, for example, parents typically have little say about values, but typically embrace them.) Even if a school's current parents are assigned an active role in defining purpose and conduct, they decisions they help shape cannot be revisited by each successive group of parents who join the school. Over time it will be largely up to the school's providers to induct new parents into the school's culture and values. This suggests that the formula for parent participation should be: "as much as the school needs." If the school will surely benefit from engaging parents seriously in its dialogue about purpose and conduct, the key shapers of its mission on a daily basis and over time are its providers. Its values consensus must begin by being truly meaningful to them so that they can commit themselves to embodying it.

Widening Consensus

Once a school's providers confirm such a consensus and make such a commitment, they need to think in broad structural terms about how to bring students and parents into the consensus. This begins with publishing and proclaiming the values and expectations in the broadest array of forums. Student assemblies and all-school meetings, back-to-school nights and parent conferences, newsletters and PTA bulletins—all provide opportunities to underscore and reinforce core values. A startup initiative to increase awareness is not enough; there must be a continuing effort that includes orientation for new members and reminders and refreshers for

everyone. For students these efforts can concentrate on values and behavior. Parents will need this information, but in addition it is often necessary to publish and reiterate very concrete guidelines for them about such things as how to communicate with the school (including how to register complaints and concerns). To many educators this seems to risk being condescending, but given the decline of institutional authority and the rise of parental anxiety, schools must be prepared to parent the parents more than they used to.

A strategic approach also has implications for entry: a prospective family needs to know what it is joining and a school needs to remember that it is welcoming a family, not just a student. In these uncertain times too many schools have decided that competitive pressures require them to be all things to all people. They fail to prepare students and parents for what the school expects, and, trying to please everyone, end up pleasing almost no one. Moreover, having failed to establish guidelines about community membership, they risk having their discipline decisions seen as arbitrary and capricious. By contrast, the more clearly and energetically a school stands for something, the more attractive it proves—and the better prepared it is to hold all its members to its standards.

None of this argues against diversity in a school. It is easier to clarify expectations in a homogeneous group than a heterogeneous one, but public schools cannot control their demographics, and many educators would never forego the richness, vitality, and preparation for real life that a diverse school can offer. Schools committed to diversity need to think hard about what it really means, about the ways they will adapt to embrace the values and traditions of different families and about the common expectations they must require of all to remain a coherent community. Having clarified this for themselves, they often need to work extra hard to disseminate this throughout the school community.

Faculty

In clarifying its core values and committing themselves to enacting and modeling these, a school's providers create and reinforce a box (structure) for its families. With this in place they can then reconsider families' needs for support (nurture). In addition to the standard remedies cited above, schools have been experimenting with a variety of promising efforts to improve students' and parents' sense of personal connection and institutional affiliation. These include creating (or upgrading) an advising system and making faculty more available to parents (having them reach out to parents proactively, respond faster when parents call, and be more willing to discuss what one teacher calls "fundamental, basic-level concerns that we used to take for granted"). It can also include training to help faculty react better when they do encounter anger, criticism, and boundary-breaking behavior by students and parents.

If a school needs its faculty to develop these and other roles and skills, its leader will have to make the case. To embrace any change, people must come to understand *why*, *what*, and *how*: why they can't just preserve the status quo; what they must start doing; and how they can learn to do it Pressures to adapt, to explain themselves more, to be in greater contact with parents—all can provoke strong resistance among teachers. But effective implementation requires candid consideration not just of the rightness of such changes, but their pragmatic importance to the school.

If teachers are to fulfill these new tasks, they deserve useful, concrete help. This means allocating time in the meeting schedule (either taking it from other topics or scheduling additional sessions) and, often, hiring consultants to provide training. Since many faculty are reluctant participants in such training, the programs must be of high quality and user-friendly. That is, they must be in plain talk, must not condescend, and must address issues from a teacher's point of view.

A Shared Dilemma, A Noble Task

There is much more to say about how schools can best respond to changing families. I have offered a starting point, trying to leaven idealism with realism, emphasizing self-knowledge and clarity of purpose, and prescribing twin tasks: to assert *and* adapt—schools must both hold fast to core values and reach out to their core constituents. I end where I began, with the recognition that there are no villains in this story, that everyone—students, parents, and providers—faces increasing stress. This is a sobering prospect, but not necessarily a discouraging one: it points us in an important direction.

Stress can only be reduced by moderating demands or increasing supports. Teachers, administrators, trustees, parents, students—each may rightly wish that others would ease up, ask less, give more. But our mutual desire for excellence and our collective anxiety about the future seem to rule out patience, tolerance, and generosity. How many teachers will, as parents wish, embrace the realities that draw parents away from children? How many parents will, as teachers wish, moderate their pursuit of material wealth to be more available to their children? And how many parents or educators want their school to relax its rigor? The demands, it seems, are here to stay. And yet it can only help for all of us to remember that we—and "they"—share a common dilemma: wanting so much to do right by the children for whom we are responsible; worrying that no matter how much we do, it is never enough; and wishing that someone else would help.

This perspective leads directly to a second: the importance of support. When demands cannot be moderated, the only other way to reduce stress is to enhance coping ability. This can mean technical skills and material resources, but it also means human support. Support is especially crucial when problems outstrip skills and resources. Then it becomes a necessity, not a luxury. Schools can benefit by increasing the opportunities, formal and informal, for educators to do for themselves what they do for students—nurture competence by honoring achievement and effort. This means not taking routine competence for granted. It means providing time and structuring ways for people to share the burdens and successes of their work with students and families; to debrief, complain, and troubleshoot, and also to celebrate successes. And it means gauging success not just by our wishes, but in light of the factors beyond our control.

This kind of support sustains morale and competence, but it does something more: it restores perspective and renews hope. The raising of the young lies at the very heart of any society. It is the noblest of tasks and it has never been more complex. Hence among the accomplishments to celebrate we must include not just positive outcomes from skillful endeavor, but the very commitment to students and families that keeps educators, in the face of unprecedented challenge, trying their best. We can ask no more.

References

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Notes

[1] See studies by Baumrind and Coopersmith.

[2] See Elias for an overview of such programs.